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Haverhill, N. H.
in the
War of the Revolution



HAVERHILL IN THE WAR OF THE REVOLUTION

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Haverhill was chartered as a township May 18, 1763. Its settlement had been begun, under promise of this charter, the previous year. It was the northernmost settlement of the province, and the nearest on the south, was Charlestown, then called Number Four, on the Connecticut and Canterbury on the Merrimac.

In the ten years following the charter the town had a prosperous growth, and a census taken in 1773 gave it a population of 387, classified as follows: unmarried men between the ages of 16 and 60, 30; married men between the ages of 16 and 60, 66; men over 60, one; unmarried females, 112; married, 66; widows, 3; negro slaves, 2.

During this period of ten years, considerable settlements had been made at Lebanon, Canaan, Cockersmouth (now Groton), Hanover, Lyme, Orford, Piermont, Bath, Landaff, Gunthwaite (now Lisbon), Lancaster, Northumberland, Conway, Wentworth, Rumney, Thornton and Plymouth in the County incorporated under the name of Grafton, but Haverhill was by far the most important town, notwithstanding the fact that Hanover had become the seat of Dartmouth College, was rapidly growing and was soon to lead in point of population if not of influence.

The importance of Haverhill had been recognized by the Royal Government, by making it in January, 1773, the shire town of Grafton County which had been incorporated two years earlier, but was not organized till 1773. John Hurd, Asa Porter, Moses Little and Bezaleel Woodward, Esquires were on May 18, appointed as Justices of His Majestys Inferior Court for the County. Of these the three first named were of Haverhill,

but the latter declining to serve for business reasons, David Hobart of Plymouth was appointed in his place.

The population of the town in April 1786 according to a census then taken was 478. It is hardly probable that the population at any one time during the years 1775-1783, exceeded 425, and yet during that period no less than 119 men and boys of the town did active military service as soldiers in the struggle for Independence.

Aside from the three men who held commissions as colonels, John Hurd, Timothy Bedel and Charles Johnston, seven were commissioned as captains and commanded companies, while 109 served in subordinate capacities as officers or in the ranks.

In the company of Rangers authorized by the Provincial Congress, May 26, 1775, mustered June 23 under Timothy Bedel as Captain, increased in July to a battalion of three companies under the same command, there were 15 Haverhill men. This battalion grew into a regiment, and was under command of Col. Bedel at the fall of St. Johns in November 1775, its term of service expiring about that time.

In the regiment authorized by the House of Representatives in January, 1776, Timothy Bedel, Colonel, which was assigned to the Northern Continental Army, and whose field of service was in Canada at St. Johns, The Cedars and elsewhere, in the spring and summer of 1776, there were 25 men from Haverhill.

In May, Benj. Whitecomb's Rangers, which some of the time acted as a company of Independent Rangers, some of the time served in the Continental service by authority of Congress, organized a part of the time as a

company and a part as a battalion, and which was in service from Oct. 15, 1776 to Dec. 31, 1779, there were six Haverhill men.

There were sixteen Haverhill men serving at various times in Col. Stark's regiment at Bunker Hill, in other New Hampshire regiments during the siege of Boston, in Col. Seammel's Continental battalion, and in other New Hampshire commands in the Continental line during the war.

In Col. Gilman's regiment at Peekskill, N. Y. during the winter of 1776 and '77 were eight Haverhill men.

One Haverhill man, Eleazer Danforth, was in Arnold's fateful expedition to Quebec, and two in Col. Warner's regiment in the Jerseys in 1775.

In Col. Hobart's regiment, in Gen. John Stark's brigade, at Bennington there were seven.

In Capt. Joseph Hutchins company, which served under command of Gen. Jacob Bayly, in the Eastern division of the Northern Army under Gen. Gates from Aug. 17 to Oct. 3, 1777, there were twenty, including Capt. Hutchins, from Haverhill.

An expedition was planned against Canada in the latter part of 1777 and it was ordered by Congress to be raised by Col. Timothy Bedel. This regiment of eight companies, five of which were commanded by Haverhill men—Ezekiel Ladd, Timothy Barren, Simeon Stevens, William Tarleton and Luther Richardson—was raised in December, 1777 and January and February 1778, and after the abandonment of the plan of the expedition, the organization was continued under the same command for the defence of the frontiers on and adjacent to Connecticut River, until Nov. 30, 1779. The muster rolls of some of these companies have been lost, but in those which have been preserved the names of sixteen Haverhill men appear.

In Col. Moses Hazen's regiment organized under act of Congress March 15, 1779 and in Gen. Hazens

later command in 1782, there were eight Haverhill men.

In order to guard the Western and northern frontiers and probably also to preserve peace and order in matters arising out of the so-called Vermont controversy, it was voted by the General Assembly Jan. 10, 1782, that Col. Charles Johnston be "im-powered to raise twelve men as a scouting party," that the place of rendezvous be Haverhill, and that he be desired to call on the town of Haverhill for supplies for the men. In accordance with this act, James Ladd, of Haverhill, raised these men who went on duty in April. June 26, the same year, it was voted that two companies of good-able, bodied, effective men of fifty each, exclusive of commissioned officers be raised immediately for the same service, that both companies be under the direction of Col. Charles Johnston, the place of rendezvous to be Haverhill, that James Ladd be a lieutenant of one of these companies and that the men whom he had previously enlisted under the act of Jan. 10 be added to the same company. Ebenezer Webster of Salisbury was captain of the first company which was in service till Nov. 5, 1782, and which contained twenty-seven men from Haverhill.

Haverhill also furnished five men for longer or shorter periods of service in New York regiments and four in Massachusetts regiments.

Many of these one hundred and nineteen men saw service two or three times as most terms of enlistment were short. The number of enlistments, as just named was 356 and this, from a town the population of which at no time in the period extending from 1775 to 1783 numbered as many as 450. It may be doubted if any New Hampshire town can in this respect show a superior if indeed an equal record. Many of these men it is true were never on the firing line, never engaged in battle, were in no long campaigns, but they rendered arduous, self-sacrificing military service in their country's cause.

The conditions existing in the Coös country of which Haverhill was the recognized political and military center were peculiar. The Coös towns had been chartered by His Majesty's governors, were a part of New Hampshire, but this part was largely nominal. Previous to the termination of the Royal Government no town in the Coös country, or on the Connecticut river had been represented in the House of Representatives except Charlestown, which was first represented in 1771. For the House of 1775, members were elected for the towns of Plymouth, Orford and Lyme by virtue of the King's writ. These members were refused seats on the ground that the writ had been issued without the Concurrence of the other branches of the Legislature, and this refusal led to an acrimonious dispute between the Governor and the House. The Governor stood on the royal prerogative, and the House upon its right to regulate its own membership, and grant the privilege of representation as it saw fit. A large number of towns in the northern and western section of the Province were aggrieved at the denial of representation, and this brought about results which later threatened the integrity of the state. Many of those who had settled in the Coös towns were men of culture and influence, and they naturally paid little heed to legislative enactments in which they had no voice.

John Hazen, James Bailey, Ephraim Wesson, Timothy Bedel had rendered honorable service as officers in the French and Indian wars. John Hurd, Asa Porter, graduates of Harvard college, Charles Johnston, John Taplin, Ezekiel Ladd, Jonathan Elkins, James Woodward, Moses Little, Timothy Barron, Joseph Hutchins, Maxi Haseltine, Jonathan Hale, Simeon Goodwin, Thomas Simpson and Andrew Savage Crocker were men of substance, of sturdy New England stock, of liberal and independent views, zealous for personal rights and liberty and with the exception of

Hazen, founder of the town, who died in the autumn of 1774, were all prominent in the affairs of the town during the Revolutionary period.

At the outset the town was prompt to take measures for defense. The records of the town meetings, annual and special, are scanty, but they furnish much of significance. At a special meeting held Nov. 4, 1774, it was voted to provide a town stock of ammunition and to raise 20 l. lawful money for that purpose. At another special meeting held January 5, 1775, a special committee consisting of James Bayley, Capt. Ephraim Weston, Capt. Charles Johnston, Simeon Goodwin, Timothy Barron, Lieut. Joseph Hutchins and Maxi Haseltine were appointed to see that the results of the Continental Congress were duly observed in the town. It will be noted that it is "the results of the Continental Congress," and nowhere in the town records is there any reference to the Provincial Congress or the House of Representatives of New Hampshire. Moreover Haverhill does not appear to be represented in any of the Provincial Congresses held in 1775 and 1776 except the Fourth and Fifth, when Ephraim Wesson and John Hurd were members of the Fourth, and John Hurd of the Fifth in which he represented the towns of Haverhill, Bath, Lyman, Gunthwaite, Landaff and Morrisstown. Just how or when Hurd and Capt. Wesson were elected as members does not appear, however, from the town records. At the March town meeting 1776, Thomas Simpson, Asa Bayley and John Page were chosen a Committee of Safety, and in 1778, James Woodward, James Abbott, James Corliss, Jonathan Hale and Maxi Haseltine were chosen to act in the same capacity. At a special meeting January 6, 1778, it was voted to supply the families of those who were in the Continental service. In 1780 Timothy Bedel, John Rich James Woodward were appointed a committee to prevent the transportation of any grain from town.

May 2, 1775, at the house of Joseph Hutchins, innholder in Haverhill, committees from the towns of Lyme, Orford, Piermont, Bath, Gunthwaite, Lancaster, Northumberland and Haverhill met in joint session and signed the following pledge:

"We, the subscribers, do solemnly declare by all the sacred ties of honor and religion that we will act at all times against all illegal and unconstitutional impositions and acts of Parliament made and enacted against the New England governments, and the continent of English North America." And we do engage to stand in opposition to all force come, or coming against us, by order of the present ministry, for supporting of the present measures, while our *lives* and *fortunes* last, or until all these notorious unconstitutional acts are repealed and the American colonies re-established in the privileges due to them as Ameriean subjects."

This pledge was signed on behalf of Haverhill by Charles Johnston, Timothy Barron, Simeon Goodwin and James Bayley. It was voted that a copy of the proceedings of the meeting be transmitted by the clerk to the Provincial Congress which was to meet at Exeter May 17, and Ezekiel Ladd was appointed a delegate to represent these committees in that Congress. The clerk, Charles Johnston, accompanied his report with a letter which shows the danger which Haverhill and the other towns believed threatened them and from which they sought relief.

After mentioning the reports that men were being invited by Gov. Carlton of Quebec, and that Indians were being engaged for the purpose of invasion of Coos, he wrote: "How near the borders of the enemy we are, every one knows who is acquainted with the boundaries of our Province. As to the position of defence, we are in difficult circumstances; we are in want of both arms and ammunition. There is very little or none worth mentioning, perhaps one pound of powder to twenty men, and not one

half of our men have arms. Now, gentlemen, we have all reason to suspect, and really look upon ourselves in imminent danger of the enemy, and at this time in no capacity for a defence for want of arms and ammunition . . . We refer the matter to your mature consideration, whether it is not necessary to give us assistance, that we may be ready in case of invasion. We have a number of men in these parts of the country who have not any real estate, who will certainly leave us unless some assistance be given; and who are ready to assist and stand by our cause with their lives, provided encouragement is given them. If you shall think it necessary to raise forces to defend this our Province, if you will give orders in what manner assistance can be procured, please to inform us as expeditiously as the nature of things will allow. There is no doubt of enlisting numbers without distressing or much interfering with towns near the seacoasts, provided we have the platform to act on." What was wanted was some color of authority on which to act.

In response to this appeal the Provincial Congress voted June 3, "that a company of sixty men be raised of the inhabitants of the western frontiers to be commissioned by the Committee of Safety, and that these and two companies out of the two thousand men raised in this colony be stationed, as soon as the Committee of Supplies procure stores for them by the Committee of Safety, on said frontiers and remain until further orders." Timothy Bedel was appointed to the command of these companies. July 7 he was commissioned Captain, and later in the month mustered his men at Haverhill, which was made the place of rendezvous. In September he marched with a greatly enlarged force to join the army of Maj.-Gen. Schuyler, who was investing St. Johns, Canada. This command, with which he rendered brilliant service, numbered, at the fall of St. Johns,

November 2, about 1,200 men, enlisted from the towns in the Coös country and the western frontiers, with some Green Mountain boys and Indians. What Haverhill wished for, in common with the other Coös towns, was authority, and, though the men authorized to be raised for defence were used for aggressive purposes, it was little more than authority that was given. So seemingly neglectful were the Exeter authorities in making provision for Col. Bedel's troops, that, down to the fall of St. Johns, it was uncertain whether his command belonged to the military establishment of the province or that of the Continental government, the result being that both governments neglected to pay his men. This neglect was probably partly due to lack of ability. Thus at the beginning and indeed all through the struggle for independence Haverhill and her sister towns felt that they had little to expect in the way of material aid from the Exeter government.

In the Fourth Provincial Congress which met May 17, 1775 and was finally dissolved November 15, Ephraim Wesson was in attendance fifty-nine days and John Hurd six days. This Congress had provided for a census to be taken of the province and, based on this census, for another Congress to be elected to meet at Exeter December 21, 1775. This latter Congress was to consist of eighty-nine members, apportioned according to population, and Grafton County, which embraced the present counties of Grafton and Coös and part of Carroll, was to be restricted to six members. Bath, Lyman, Gunthwaite, Landaff and Morristown were classed with Haverhill, and Col. John Hurd of Haverhill was chosen the member from these towns, though no record of his election is found in any of the towns. It was provided that in case the Continental Congress should recommend this colony to assume government in any way that would require a House of

Representatives, the Congress might resolve itself into such a House for the term of one year. Col. Hurd was beyond question one of the most prominent and useful members of this body. He was a man of marked personality and exerted a dominating influence in Haverhill and Grafton County during the early years of the Revolutionary period. He had received a liberal education, graduating at Harvard in the Class of 1747. Removing to Portsmouth some time after 1760, he became one of the coterie of friends and advisors of John Wentworth, when he came to the governorship in 1767, who gave him large grants of land in various towns in the northern part of the State. He came to Haverhill in the latter part of 1772, and at once took a leading part in the affairs of the town. He had a large acquaintance in Rockingham County, was probably more familiar with the general affairs of the province and had more influence with His Majesty's government at Portsmouth than any other resident of Coös. When, however, it came to a choice between the cause of the Colony and the King, he did not for a moment hesitate, and took at once a pronounced position. When the Provincial Congress in June 1775 determined that John Fenton was no longer to be trusted with the records of the Grafton Courts, they were placed in the custody of Col. Hurd for safekeeping, and he was continued as colonel of the militia which had been enrolled in Coös for purposes of defence. When the Congress met in December 1775, he at once took a prominent part in its proceedings. He was a member of the committee appointed to draw up a plan of government, a committee which framed the first civil compact or constitution for New Hampshire. He was chairman of the committee to draft a form of oath to be entered into by members of the new government, and also of a committee to audit accounts against the colony. The temporary constitution which

went into effect January 5, 1776, provided that after resolving itself into a House of Representatives, the said House should choose twelve persons to be a distinct and separate branch of the Legislature, by the name of a Council. Under this provision Col. Hurd was chosen on the councillor to which the County of Grafton was entitled and he thereupon vacated his seat in the House. The old county offices were held to be abolished and the Legislature proceeded to establish others. Col. Hurd was continued in his office as first justice of the inferior Court of Common Pleas, his associates being Bezaleel Woodward, Israel Morey and Samuel Emerson. He was also chosen county treasurer and recorder of deeds and conveyances. In the Council he took a leading position, serving on its most important committees; among others, first on the committee appointed June 11, 1776, to draft the declaration of the general assembly for the independence of the United Colonies. He was also given pretty much the entire control of the military operations in Coös. Haverhill was made the place of rendezvous for soldiers intended for service in Canada, and Col. Hurd with Col. Morey was to enlist the companies, muster and form the men, give orders to the companies of rangers raised to protect the frontiers and deliver commissions to those whom the soldiers had chosen as their officers.

The Legislature adjourned July 6, and Col. Hurd found affairs in Haverhill in anything but a satisfactory state on his arrival home. The American soldiers in Canada were retreating before the superior force of Gen. Burgoyne. Col. Bedel who had in the previous January, returning from Canada to Haverhill, raised in the Coös County a second regiment and taken it through the woods on snowshoes to "the Cedars" near Montreal, was under arrest, and shortly to be dismissed from the service. A great state of alarm ex-

isted. Haverhill had been fortified to some extent, the towns to the north, Bath and Gunthwaite were practically deserted, and many had left Haverhill for their own homes. Among those who had left was Mrs. Hurd, whom her husband met at Concord on his way home, and from which place he sent back to Exeter urgent appeals for help.

Aside from this, he found that the new government of which he was so important a member was held in anything but high esteem by his constituents. Representation in the House of Representatives was based on population and Grafton County had but six members in a total of eighty-nine. The towns in that county and in the western part of the State had been settled by men who believed the town to be the unit of government and entitled to representation as a town, in any legislative assembly. Hanover and the five Grafton County towns classed with it had refused to send a member and Hanover men led by Col. John Wheelock and Bezaleel Woodward had been active during the summer in stirring up disaffection with the Exeter government in the towns to the north, Haverhill among others. Col. Hurd had hardly arrived home before the famous convention of representatives from Coös towns met in College Hall at (Dresden) Hanover to protest against the authority assumed to be exercised over them by the government at Exeter.

Col. Hurd also discovered, or at least thought he discovered that his neighbor and former associate on the Grafton County bench, Col. Asa Porter, was among those who were believed to be plotting to throw Coös under the protection of Gen. Burgoyne. Col. Hurd himself was an ardent revolutionist, but his association for years with the exclusive set that had been in control of the province, naturally made him a strong partisan of the government at Exeter in the organization of which he had so actively participated, and caused

him to look upon disloyalty to that government as little less than treason to the country. Col. Porter was a marked personality and wielded large influence in the early history of Haverhill. A graduate of Harvard in the Class of 1742, he had engaged in mercantile pursuits at Newburyport for a time, till he acquired large landed property in Coös, and came to Haverhill about 1770, where he at once took a leading position in affairs. A man of large means, aristocratic in his tendencies and habits, he undoubtedly had little sympathy with the revolutionary acts of his neighbors — Johnston, Hurd, Bedel, Wesson, Barron and others.

He certainly had little sympathy with the Exeter government. Human nature was much the same in 1775 and 1776 as now. He had been dropped from his office of justice of the County Court on its re-organization, while Hurd had not only been retained, but had also been made Councillor for the County, recorder of deeds, county treasurer, and had returned home a kind of military dictator. It is just possible that Col. Hurd may have shown signs of consciousness of his own importance, which might have made his reception by his neighbor and former judicial colleague less enthusiastic than he wished. This much is certain: Col. Porter was a positive man and was beyond question outspoken in his criticism of the Exeter government for its neglect to send aid to the seriously threatened people of Coös, and under the circumstances he naturally became an object of suspicion to Col. Hurd who became convinced that Porter was "practising things inimical to his country. Col. Porter's arrest followed and, after examination by the Committees of Safety of Haverhill and Bath he was sent to Exeter, where he was tried by the Committee of Safety, placed under bonds to remain on his father's farm in Boxford, Mass., and only permitted to return to Haverhill in November, 1777, where he re-

sided until his death in 1818, loyal to his government, influential with his townsmen, and prominent in the affairs of his section.

John Hurd rendered most important and valuable service to the patriot cause, though his influence in Haverhill, because of the Porter affair, and the growing disaffection of the people with the Exeter government was on the wane, and he ceased to take an active part in affairs after the former part of 1777. He returned to his earlier Boston home and his remains lie in the Old Granary burying ground of that city.

Haverhill and the towns classed with it refused to comply with the precepts issued in the name of the Council and House of Representatives, and at meetings called in 1776 for the choice of members of the Council and House, chose committees to return the precepts with reasons for non-compliance. The voters of Haverhill presented reasons very similar to those of other towns, which were in brief as follows: the plan of representation was inconsistent with the liberties of a free people; the classification of towns for purposes of representation was in violation of undoubted rights inhering in towns as units of government; none but freeholders were entitled to election; no bill of rights had been drawn up or any form of government established subsequent to the Declaration of Independence; a Council having power to negative proceedings of the House of Representatives was dangerous; and if a Council was to be authorized at all, it should be elected on a general ticket by the whole people instead of by districts. It may be noted in passing that not all the theories of government vociferously urged today are wholly new. Haverhill was certainly "Progressive" in 1776.

From 1777 on, till the close of the Revolution, Haverhill acknowledged but little allegiance to the Exeter government. She refused representation in the New Hampshire Legislature, but remained steadfastly loyal

to the revolutionary cause. She furnished men for defence and for aggression. She responded to calls for men for any service in the patriot cause, though preferring that the calls and requisitions should be made by the Continental Congress instead of the New Hampshire Government.

Timothy Bedel returning to Haverhill in 1776 after an absence of three or four years in Bath, again rendered valuable service and probably recruited more men for the patriot cause than any other citizen of the State. His grave in the old cemetery at Haverhill Corner is marked by a simple stone slab from which the inscription, except that of his name, has been obliterated by the storms of a hundred years. Charles Johnston, who succeeded Col. Hurd in the work of the defence of the borders, who as Lieutenant-Colonel of Col. Hobart's regiment in Stark's brigade at Bennington, by personal bravery and skillful handling of his men won undying honor, rendered during all the years invaluable service, and became the most influential and prominent citizen of the town, doing more perhaps than any other to bring the town and section into harmony with the State government. His grave, but a few feet distant from that of Col. Bedel, merits a more substantial monument than the crumbling stone on which only this inscription is now decipherable.:

"Col. Charles Johnston died March 5, 1813, in his 75th year."

Haverhill's prominence in the great struggle of independence was due in part to her geographical position. The town was the doorway of entrance from the north to eastern New England and was constantly in danger of attack by forces from Canada.

The inhabitants were in almost a constant state of alarm from invasion from that section. Stockades were built at four different places for security and at one time people from Bath and Gunthwaite were gathered in these, through fear of an attack by Indians. After the fall of Ticonderoga in 1777, and again in 1780 there was special alarm. Town expenses increased and population at one time decreased, many, for the most part non-land owners, removing to more safe and central parts of the State; but through these troublous times men and supplies were furnished without wavering. There was hardly an able-bodied man or boy in town who was not at some time under enlistment for a longer or shorter period, and doing duty as scout, ranger or soldier of the line.

Few descendants of these men of the early time are found in the Haverhill of the present, and it is significant of the changes that have taken place in New England population that the leaders in the struggles of that time, Hurd, Bedel, Johnston, Barron, Tarleton, Ladd, Simpson, Stevens, Richardson and Hutchins have no representatives in the citizenship of the town today. They are not, however, wholly forgotten.

The soldiers' monument which will be erected in the town this present year will happily and appropriately be a memorial not only to the one hundred and forty-seven men of Haverhill who followed the flag from 1861 to 1865, to preserve liberty and union, but also to the one hundred and nineteen men who in an earlier time, amid the hardships and privations of pioneer life risked lives and fortunes to make liberty and union possible.

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